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STATE PLEASE PASS TO PEACE CORPS

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SUBJECT: VISIT TO BAGUIO CELEBRATES AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND
PHILIPPINE-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP DAY

¶1. SUMMARY. Ambassador July 9 and 10 visit to Baguio celebrated the simultaneous July 4 holidays of American Independence and Philippine-American Friendship Day. The Ambassador participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Baguio Mayor officially opening the Picturing America exhibit in the city's shopping mall atrium. In the evening the Ambassador hosted a barbecue to celebrate U.S. Independence Day with key representatives from the community and government of the city and Peace Corps volunteers. During a morning television interview the Ambassador commented on current issues affecting both the Philippines and the United States. The Ambassador concluded her visit by hosting a breakfast for members of the Philippine Military Academy, who appreciated the opportunity to meet the Ambassador and officers from the Embassy's Defense Attach Office and Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group. END SUMMARY.

Background: The U.S. in Baguio

¶2. Americans established Baguio City, a northern town surrounded by indigenous communities, in 1900 at the site of an Ibaloi village known as Kafagway. It was designated by the Philippine Commission as the Summer Capital of the Philippines on June 1, 1903, and incorporated as a city by the Philippine Assembly on September 1, 1909. Modern Baguio remains an important location, serving as the seat of government of the Cordillera Administrative Region, with a presidential mansion, as well as Supreme Court and legislative offices. American companies, such as Texas Instruments and Moog Controls, have established high-tech manufacturing facilities that both operate state-of-the-art facilities in the city and employ thousands of employees. Peace Corps volunteers contribute in the areas of education, youth development and environmental protection. The U.S. Mission provides books and materials to an American Shelf at the Baguio City Public Library, the Philippine Military Academy, and an American Studies Resource Center at St. Louis University. USAID supports several local environmental and health initiatives, which our Commercial Section continues to assist American companies in the Baguio area.

"Picturing America" Exhibit Opens in Baguio

¶3. The Ambassador invited Baguio Mayor Reinaldo Bautista, Jr. to participate in the July 9 ribbon-cutting ceremony opening the Picturing America exhibit, a collection of high-quality reproductions of American artistic masterpieces and heritage. In his remarks at the event, Mayor Bautista spoke of the positive impact of American influence on the local and national educational systems in Baguio beginning with the American educators known as the Thomasites. The Ambassador expressed gratitude for the Philippine-U.S. friendship and recognized the upcoming centennial celebration of the city in September. She spoke of America's Independence Day celebration, presented the 4th of July message from Secretary Clinton, and invited those in attendance to experience the exhibit with her as a study of American history.

Barbeque Strengthens Ties with Key Local Figures

14. The Ambassador hosted a July 9 barbeque at the U.S. Embassy Residence in Baguio to celebrate U.S. Independence Day and to recognize Philippine-American Friendship Day. The event served as an opportunity to strengthen relationships with key members of the Philippine and Baguio City governments and other members of the community. Other attendees included Peace Corps volunteers from around the region, faculty and cadets from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), local business owners, and American Citizen Wardens.

Television Interview Hits Current Issues

15. Local talk show hosts interviewed the Ambassador for a morning television program that is broadcast throughout the region. The 10-minute interview addressed issues ranging from the H1N1 virus to the death of Michael Jackson. The Ambassador took advantage of the opportunity to address the Veteran's Bill and remind eligible viewers to apply for benefits. Thirty-four million dollars had already been disbursed, the Ambassador commented, while calling attention to the many benefits already enjoyed by Filipino veterans. Noting the global challenges presented by the H1N1 virus, the Ambassador reminded the viewers the best safeguard against the virus is to practice good hygiene habits.

Recruitment Down at PMA, Scholarships Requested

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16. The Ambassador hosted a breakfast at the U.S. Embassy Residence in Baguio with Vice Admiral Leonardo Calderon, Jr., Superintendent of the PMA, and five other key faculty members. Also in attendance were two representatives from DAO and one from JUSMAG. The Superintendent expressed concern over PMA's ability to recruit qualified applicants as potential cadets turn to careers in seafaring. In recent admissions seasons, a smaller percentage of qualified applications was received than anticipated, leading PMA to open new recruitment offices in shopping malls to attract more and better qualified applicants. The Superintendent also requested U.S. assistance in obtaining scholarships at U.S. universities for PMA faculty to take advanced courses, including English, and expressed interest in sending officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to graduate degree programs in the U.S. The Ambassador offered to look at having senior U.S. Military and civilian personnel give talks at PMA, and they discussed the possibility of posting a U.S. Military officer on long-term assignment as a guest teacher at PMA.

KENNEY